

CITY OF BELLEVUE
DOWNTOWN LIVABILITY
CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

May 15, 2013
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-120

MEMBERS PRESENT: Aaron Laing, Ernie Simas, co-chairs; Patrick Bannon, Michael Chaplin, Hal Ferris, Gary Guenther, Brad Helland, Trudi Jackson, Loretta Lopez, Lee Maxwell, Erin Powell

MEMBERS ABSENT: Mark D'Amato, Jan Stout, David Sutherland, Ming Zhang

OTHERS PRESENT: Dan Stroh, Emil King, Patti Wilma, Department of Planning & Community Development

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The meeting was called to order at 6:41 p.m. by Co-chair Simas.

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Mr. Helland. The motion was seconded by Mr. Guenther and it carried unanimously.

2. WELCOME BY MAYOR

Mayor Lee thanked the members for their participation in this important project. Downtown Bellevue is the goose that laid the golden egg; it is the reason the City's tax rates are low and certainly is a prime contributor to the City's economic health. It took good planning to develop the vision for the Downtown and good staff to carry out that vision. Plans, however, need to be updated and adjusted over time in order to be relevant. Bellevue is particularly strong because it goes to great lengths to involve its citizens in planning, and because its citizens are so willing to get involved.

Mayor Lee said a timeline for the study has been established, but stressed that the timeline is second to making sure the work is done right. Planning done right will assure that the goose will continue to lay golden eggs in the years to come.

3. COMMITTEE AND STAFF INTRODUCTIONS

Co-chair Simas asked the committee members and staff to introduce themselves.

Brad Helland said he serves as chair of the Environmental Services Commission and works as an environmental consultant.

Patrick Bannon said he serves as president of the Bellevue Downtown Association.

Gary Guenther said he works as a commercial real estate broker and would be representing the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce.

Erin Powell said she is a member of the Parks and Community Services Board, works at REI and lives in the Bellecrest neighborhood.

Loretta Lopez said she has for many years been very active with the Bridle Trails Community Club and lives in that neighborhood. She said she owns a business in the City and was chosen to serve as a citywide representative.

Trudi Jackson said she is a member of the Bellevue Arts Commission and is the executive director of the Bellevue Youth Symphony Orchestra.

Co-chair Ernie Simas said he is the current chair of the Transportation Commission.

Co-chair Aaron Laing said he is a member of the Planning Commission, lives in the Enatai neighborhood, and is a land use attorney.

Lee Maxwell, a resident of Surrey Downs just to the south of the Downtown, said she has in the past served on other committees on behalf of the City, including the committee that helped bring Meydenbauer Convention Center out of the ground.

Michael Chaplin said he works as an architect and has been in the Bellevue area for more than 30 years.

Hal Ferris, a member of the Planning Commission for the last seven years, said he is a real estate developer focused on infill, mixed use and student housing.

Planning Director Dan Stroh said he would be assisting the staff project managers for the project. He noted that he has been involved in a number of downtown planning efforts over the years.

Strategic Planning Manager Emil King said he was co-manager for the project.

Community Development Manager Patti Wilma said she was the other co-manager for the project.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Brian Brand, owner of Baylis Architects in Bellevue, spoke representing the Bellevue Downtown Association as immediate past chair and member of the Urban

Planning and Transportation Committee, and the newly formed Land Use and Livability Committee which was created to assist in the Downtown Livability project. He said the Bellevue Downtown Association was actively involved in the Downtown Implementation Plan update in 2003 that produced recommendations for plan and code updates as well as forming the great place strategy. In 2004 the City and the Bellevue Downtown Association co-sponsored the Downtown Design Charrette that spent two days coming up with ideas for the Downtown; the charrette resulted in a sketchbook that was published by the City in early 2005. At about the same time the sketchbook came out, the Bellevue Downtown Association decided to form a land use task force, a committee which continues to be active. In 2010 the committee promoted the land use update and livability process that was voted down by the City Council due to budget considerations. The Council did, however, direct that the Downtown Transportation Plan be updated. In February 2012, the Bellevue Downtown Association adopted a land use and livability strategy and recommendations document which promoted updating the code, adding flexibility to allow for more creative design, and improving livability. The Bellevue Downtown Association also developed a new strategic plan focused on a thriving retail destination, a center of innovative companies and knowledge workers, and a healthy and engaged residential community. Copies of the Downtown land use and livability strategy document were made available to the CAC members.

Mr. Stu Vander Hoek with the Vander Hoek Corporation commented that one of Bellevue's strengths is the fact that the people who have the passion stay at the table. He noted that those selected to serve on the CAC have all been active in City issues over the years. He said he participated in the Downtown Implementation Plan update in 1989 and again in 2003. Plans that are made must be reviewed and updated over time to bring new and fresh ideas to the table, but decisions made in the past should not be forgotten or overlooked. The Bellevue Downtown Association intends to participate in an active way in the livability study. The study timeframe and budget are both tight so it will be challenging for the CAC members to work through and absorb all of the information the staff and consultants will bring forward. The Bellevue Downtown Association is concerned that the study may turn into something driven by the staff or the consultants instead of the CAC members. The scope for the study is broad and as such could lead to some misunderstandings. Digging deep and asking lots of questions will help. Downtown residents, business persons and customers all have expected outcomes for the effort, with predictability being high on the list.

Ms. Margot Blacker, 2011 100th Avenue NE, said she served on the City Council in 1990s and was president of the Northtowne Community Club in 1981 when the Downtown rezone was put into place. She said Northtowne was supportive of the rezone action that turned Bellevue from being a suburban city to an urban city. One thing that came out of the rezone was hard and fast boundaries on the north and west. The commitment to those borders have allowed residential Northtowne to thrive, which is unusual for an area close to an urban core. That commitment must be held inviolate. She said in 1992 she spearheaded an effort to place height limits on the O-1 and O-2 districts and to clean up the edges of the Downtown, and the reason was to avoid becoming a Seattle with 80-story buildings. The commitments made to design standards should be

kept because they will bring about excellent urban design, great streets, buildings without blank walls, and an orientation toward people.

Mr. Warren Koons, a board member of the Bellevue Downtown Association and co-chair of the land use and livability committee, urged the need to keep the process fair. The committee members should listen carefully to and seek information from stakeholders in the Downtown who will be most profoundly affected. The scope is broad and the timing is tight, but the study represents a great opportunity for the City. The ultimate product should include predictable yet flexible tools and should be practical and feasible while being forward looking. There is some skepticism among the members of the Bellevue Downtown Association that the study will simply be put on the shelf at the end, but every effort will be put into making sure that does not happen. The Bellevue Downtown Association intends to work collaboratively with the CAC and play a positive and supportive role.

Mr. Bob Wallace, PO Box 4184, said he has lived in Bellevue for the past 40 years and has in the past participated in efforts to revise codes in Seattle. He noted that the imposition of what seemed like good ideas in the past resulted in missing development cycles. Policies must be reasonable and make economic sense. It is in vogue in Seattle to give with one hand but extract with the other, and while that is the way things work, if the extractions are out of balance with respect to the benefits, nothing will happen. To some degree that balance is missing in the Bel-Red corridor where the land is not worth enough to justify tearing down the old existing buildings.

5. REVIEW OF COMMITTEE CHARGE AND OPERATING GUIDELINES; CONFIRMATION OF ONGOING COMMITTEE MEETING SCHEDULE

Co-chair Laing called attention to the advisory committee operating guidelines and scope and Council principles. He said meetings are slated to occur on the third Wednesday of each month beginning at 6:30 p.m. While most meetings will run about two hours, some may need to be somewhat longer.

On the question of whether or not the CAC should meet in August, the month in which the Council and most of the city's boards and commissions do not meet, Co-chair Simas proposed not making that decision until the June or July meeting. Co-chair Laing allowed that a schedule has been established, but the group has also been admonished not just to get the work done but to get it done right, which could argue in favor of being flexible with the schedule.

Co-chair Laing said every attempt will be made to see decisions made by consensus. Where there is a need, however, votes will be taken and the majority will rule. The committee members were encouraged to attend all of the meetings to assure continuity and to allow for a diversity of opinions.

Ms. Maxwell asked if presentations made by consultants and stakeholders could be visually recorded. Mr. King said staff would look into that possibility.

Co-chair Laing reported that along with Co-chair Simas, Mayor Lee and Mr. Stroh, he met recently with a small group from the Bellevue Downtown Association to go over some details. He said the CAC will need as much information from the community as possible, and nothing should be done that would discourage anyone from providing feedback.

Mr. Helland stressed the need to have materials delivered to the members a full week ahead of meetings. Co-chair Simas said that has been shared with the staff. He added that there will be a general expectation that materials provided will be read ahead of committee meetings so discussions can be more productive.

Co-chair Simas said in addition to the scheduled meetings there may be an opportunity to conduct a couple of informational workshops depending on the direction the Committee takes.

With regard to the scope and principles, Co-chair Simas suggested that the document defines what the Committee asked been asked to accomplish. He said the project scope items shown in the left-hand column in the document are those the Committee will absolutely and positively need to get right; the items in the right-hand column are also important but fit into and are therefore ancillary to the left-hand column items. He allowed that the Committee is free to make adjustments to the project scope as deemed necessary to either add or subtract items.

Co-chair Simas reviewed with the CAC members the principles as adopted by the Council.

Ms. Lopez pointed out that several during public comment highlighted the need to keep in mind all the previous studies and suggested the Committee would benefit by having a short summary of the previous studies and the conclusions reached by them.

A motion to approve the operating guidelines as submitted was made by Mr. Helland. The motion was seconded by Ms. Maxwell and it carried unanimously.

6. PROJECT CONTEXT AND APPROACH

Mr. Stroh said livability, connectivity, community and sustainability are all words associated with cutting edge urban centers. With characteristics like those, urban centers are attracting the creative class, millennials, and those who are generally driving the economic engine of city centers. The Bellevue Downtown Association tour of Denver in the fall of 2012 highlighted how successful that city has been at attracting those who are fueling the innovation economy. Their work has involved a lot of elements that had to come together to make it happen, many of which are already in place in Downtown Bellevue. The list of elements includes a distinctive public realm with inviting public spaces; the idea of life first/work second; multiple overlapping activities, including diverse cultural pieces; mobility choices; sustainability; and memorability.

Bellevue as a whole encompasses some 32 square miles, whereas the Downtown Subarea covers only about two-thirds of a square mile, into which most of Bellevue's future employment and residential development will occur. Clearly the Downtown is important to the City's future growth strategy. There is an increasing interest in what should happen just east of the freeway in the Wilburton commercial district. The Medical Institution district to the north of NE 8th Street is burgeoning and becoming a significant development node.

The Downtown proper is bounded by single family uses on the north, west and south sides, something that is very unusual for city centers. At one time, the thinking was that the Downtown core would be populated almost entirely with office uses, but in fact residential uses have become a major land use. Most city centers tend to be elongated, but because Downtown Bellevue is a square, most amenities are within a five- to ten-minute walk. With only a couple of exceptions, there are buildings covering all of the Downtown area and redevelopment of the underused parcels can be expected. For many years most of the parking in the Downtown has been underground, but parking is a very expensive component of projects.

The Downtown is currently home to just over 43,000 jobs; the City as a whole has on the order of 140,000 jobs. The Downtown is by far the city's strongest regional center and will continue to be into the future. There are some 10,500 residents living in the Downtown, up from 7,300 at the time of the 2010 census. The expectation is that the residential figures will continue to grow at a healthy clip, with the forecast projecting close to 19,000 residents in the Downtown by 2030.

Continuing, Mr. Stroh shared with the committee a map showing the sites on which redevelopment is expected to occur. He said a 3D model will be used to help visualize building form and height during the study.

Co-chair Laing asked how the sites expected to redevelopment were selected and what the timeframe is for the anticipated redevelopment. Mr. Stroh said the sites were chosen by comparing what is currently on the ground against the value of the land. He said it will take many development cycles and many years to see all of the sites redeveloped. The point is that there are a number of sites involved which speaks to a future evolution of the Downtown.

Mr. King shared a map showing where people are living in the Downtown. He noted that 10 or 15 years ago there was no one living in the O-1 and O-2 districts, but with Lincoln Square, Bellevue Towers and the Bravern now in place, that has changed. Residential units are, however, spread out throughout the downtown land use districts. Moving forward the anticipation is that most of the blocks that currently have no residential units will in time.

Mr. King compared the 2010 census figures for the Downtown against the most current data for the downtown and for the City as a whole. He noted that in 2000 the median age

of the 2,500 Downtown residents was 57; currently the median age is only 34, which is lower than the City as a whole. Some 66 percent of all current Downtown residents are well educated, and the residents represent a wide mix of ethnicities mirroring the city as a whole.

Co-chair Laing said he would be interested to know the percentage split of downtown residents relative to renters and homeowners.

Mr. King explained that the study will not look to make other than tweaks and small changes to the Downtown Subarea Plan. The committee is charged with taking the broader perspective on code updates and providing sufficient detail for their recommendations; the Planning Commission will ultimately review specific code revisions prior to the Council adoption process.

Ms. Jackson noted that work to update the City's Comprehensive Plan is under way and she asked if the work of the CAC will feed into that work or if the focus will be on the Comprehensive Plan as it currently exists. Mr. King pointed out that while much of the Downtown Plan was adopted in 2004 it continues to provide good policy direction.

Mr. Stroh added that neither the Council or the staff anticipate that the Comprehensive Plan update work will include significant changes to the Downtown Subarea Plan. He clarified that the work of the CAC will differ from the work done by the Bel-Red CAC in that the focus for Bel-Red was on essentially effecting a fundamental transformation. That group worked to develop a vision for the corridor relative to the transportation and land use components. The Downtown Livability study will build on the pieces that are already in place that have been providing solid guidance.

Co-chair Laing said the Planning Commission is the only body required under growth management for dealing with long-range planning. The City's various boards and commissions chew on their individual parts of the elephant and make recommendations to the Planning Commission, which in turn incorporates to the degree possible those recommendations into the Comprehensive Plan and the Land Use Code before making an overall recommendation to the City Council, which has the final approval authority. As structured, the CAC will be providing a detailed recommendation to the Planning Commission.

Mr. King urged the members to think of the Downtown as a series of individual districts and neighborhoods. When the Downtown Plan was constructed ten years ago, names were given to the various districts as a means of breaking down the whole into more manageable pieces. The notion of signature or themed streets was developed at the same time and continues to be a planning tool for the committee to work with. The design charrette conducted several years ago resulted in some very good ideas for the Downtown, and the intent is to pull out some of the interesting conclusions to see how they might fit. The Great Streets document, while not codified, includes a number of good ideas regarding the street and sidewalk environment, and those ideas may be

applicable to the current study. The open space audit conducted a couple of years ago also includes ideas that will inform the work of the CAC.

Mr. King reminded the committee that the kickoff open house event for Downtown Livability was conducted in late November 2012; it was the first of the outreach efforts for the project and it was attended by some 150 people. That was followed in March 2013 with eight focus groups hosted over a period of seven days. The comments from each of the groups were captured and categorized by topical area for the CAC to review and build on. Walking tours were also scheduled and served as good opportunities to hear what people had to say about specific areas of the Downtown.

Mr. King briefly reviewed with the committee the topics to be discussed at each of the upcoming meetings. He allowed, however, that the schedule was subject to revision as necessary and noted that longer workshop meetings may be scheduled at which the range of alternatives to be analyzed could be identified. Mr. Stroh said staff will come to the workshops with ideas for various ways to frame the alternatives, but committee engagement will be needed to make sure the alternatives to be studied make sense and are acceptable to the committee.

Mr. Bannon asked how the consultants will be interacting with the committee. Mr. King said the consultants will act as an extension of the staff. They will conduct background work and will make some of the presentations to the committee, all the while working under the same guidelines as everyone else.

Mr. Ferris noted that the first topic under the change heading in the scope and principles document references what is working and what is not working. He said during the committee walking tour a number of things that are working were identified, but there were also things highlighted that are not working. If there is already a list of what is working and what is not working the work of the committee will be benefited. Mr. Stroh said the purpose of the audits was to take each of the issues, determine what the code says about each, and compare them to what is on the ground. The comments generated by the March focus groups inform that information. The CAC will use the audits and focus group comments to develop a set of objectives about what things should be reinforced and what things should be shifted a little bit.

Co-chair Laing pointed out the need to allow time for the stakeholders to take a really good look at the audits and add to the feedback received concerning them. The CAC members then need time to reflect on the feedback from the stakeholders before starting the work of chewing on the problems and defining alternatives.

Answering a question asked by Mr. Chaplin, Mr. Stroh said the schedule, which is admittedly aggressive, is not set in stone. He said when opening the Land Use Code, the longer the playing field is unclear, the more there will be issues faced by the development community, even when it is perceived that things will be better in the end. The aggressive timeline was developed with an eye on allowing for sufficient time to work through the issues, but if it needs to be adjusted it can be.

Mr. Helland noted that the packet materials included biographical information about each CAC member but not about the staff or consultants. He suggested having the latter would be useful for the committee.

Commissioner Ferris commented that Bellevue is in competition with other jurisdictions, many of which have recently been making big changes to their codes. Redmond has made land use changes for the Overlake area, Issaquah is working on changes, and Seattle just finished its South Lake Union study. He suggested that the City should take a careful look at what its strengths and weaknesses are along with all possible opportunities for addressing competition in the marketplace. Ms. Wilma said that certainly will part of the best practices analysis.

Co-chair Laing said his preference would be to host an open house event, collect feedback from the public, and allow the CAC time to digest that information before conducting the workshop. The audits were intended to provide some specific references to what the City was hoping to get, what the code says, what has actually been brought online, and what the public feedback has been. The committee is tasked with delving into the issues, not with just being told what works and what does not work. The schedule should allow for thoroughly reviewing the details and public comments before getting into deciding what should be done.

Mr. Helland suggested the schedule should be drafted to allow for a review of the audits, followed by formalizing the objectives, followed by the open house, followed by time to digest the outcome of the open house before holding the second round of focus groups and then conducting the alternatives workshop. He allowed that would push the schedule timeframe back.

Ms. Maxwell said the process as outlined is very front loaded as far as what the committee needs to do. It needs to be done right, and that will mean engaging the stakeholders in the initial audit decisions. Even if that takes a third of the overall time, that would be better than shooting ahead only to find it necessary to go back and make some adjustments.

Mr. Bannon agreed with the need to first build a foundation on which to work. Community input will be a vital component of the foundation.

Mr. Chaplin concurred with the need to understand the comments from the stakeholders and the public before the alternatives workshop.

Co-chair Simas said he was hearing the committee say it wanted to take up the audit reviews at the June 19 meeting and follow that up with the open house.

Mr. Helland suggested the open house could be scheduled for the week following the June 19 meeting, provided that would fit with staff's schedule.

Ms. Jackson commented that the open house and the second round of focus groups will be most productive if there is new information to discuss. If those elements are slated to occur too early in the process, there will be nothing to react to other than what is already known. She added that not all of the CAC members are in the development business and could benefit from a presentation on things such as building height and the trade-offs involved prior to conducting any more focus groups.

Ms. Chaplin asked if the workshops will be open to the public. Mr. Stroh said everything the committee does will be open to the public.

Answering a question asked by Mr. Chaplin, Mr. Stroh explained that the final recommendation will come from the committee, not the consultant or the staff. The consultant will play a supportive role to the committee and their products will be keyed to the committee's schedule. Their deliverables will be aimed at assisting the committee in making informed decisions.

Mr. Stroh said as originally laid out the audit was intended to serve as a diagnosis and an opportunity to be clear about the public feedback, melded with the professional judgments of staff regarding how the code provisions have played out over time. The audits were intended to highlight both what is working well and what needs some tweaking. The idea was that there was enough from the first round of focus groups and the audits to form a strong foundation. The workshop was seen as an opportunity to study a range of ways to address the issues identified and to put down on paper the range of alternatives to study. Once the committee is clear about the alternatives, it would be appropriate to schedule additional focus groups aimed at getting feedback regarding the alternatives. With the collective information in hand, additional tweaks and refinements can be made before finally deciding what direction to take. If, however, the committee wants to take more time to gain public feedback on the audits that can be folded into the schedule.

There was consensus to involve and seek public input regarding the audit, the alternatives, and the committee's recommendation before forwarding the full package on to the Council. The staff agreed to come back on June 19 with a modified schedule.

7. REVIEW OF SCOPE ELEMENTS AND PUBLIC INPUT TO DATE

There was agreement to hold this item over to the June 19 meeting.

8. ADJOURN

Co-chair Laing adjourned the meeting at 9:02 p.m.